

# Ray, Sirhan— What Possessed Them?

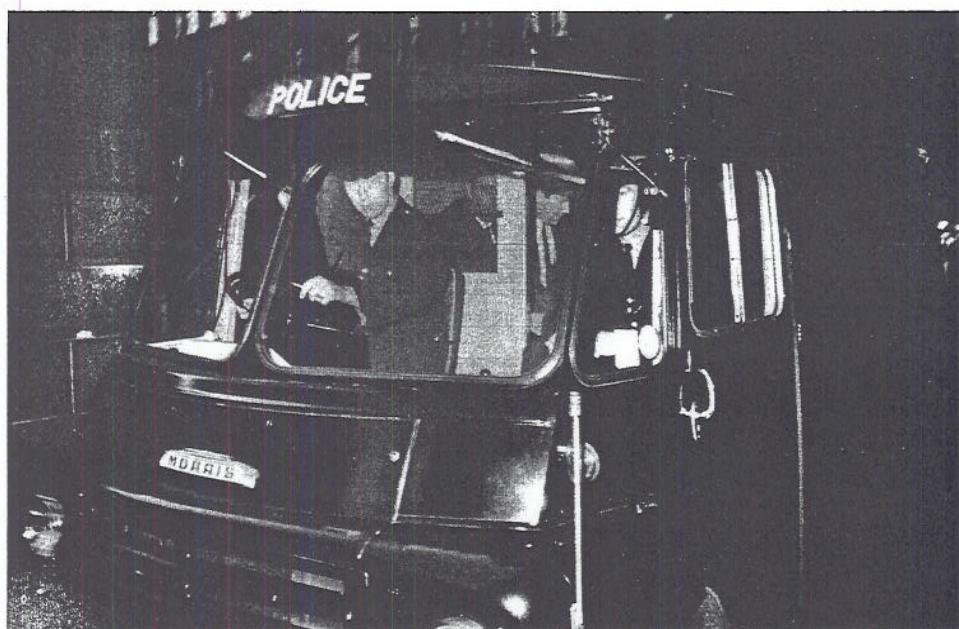
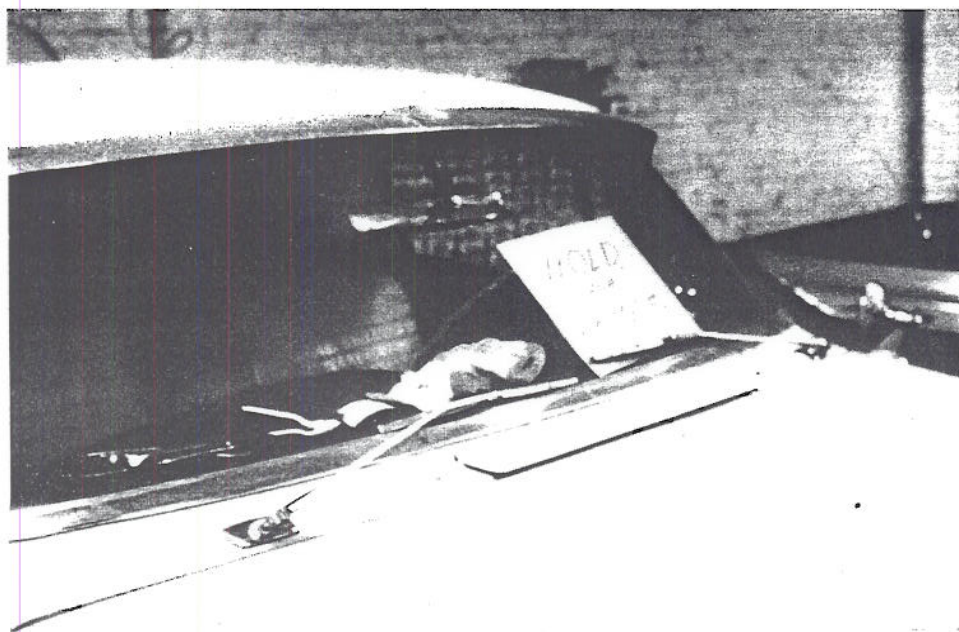
by PAUL O'NEIL

Encapsulated in their cells—one in London's ancient, red-brick Wandsworth Prison and the other in Los Angeles' bright and sterile Public Safety Building—the two of them seemed as innocuous as those waxen criminals which so blandly confront tourists at Madame Tussaud's museum. Neither demonstrated the slightest sign of trepidity. Sirhan Bishara Sirhan seemed possessed by a kind of martyr's righteousness. James Earl Ray was simply cautious and calculating—a stir-wise con in a familiar environment. The discharge of two minute particles of lead—an ironic fraction of the bullets which daily kill soldiers, rioters and victims of crimes less celebrated than Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King—had shocked the world and changed both the social climate and the political history of the U.S. But Sirhan and Ray seemed important now only as devices by which other men might gauge the meaning of their senseless violence.

The nine-week manhunt for James Ray—which culminated, by fantastic coincidence, almost at the moment of Robert Kennedy's funeral in New York—cost nearly \$1.5 million and involved 3,000 of J. Edgar Hoover's 6,600 FBI agents. Canada's Royal Mounted Police assisted—and discovered fugitive Ray's spurious new identity through a passport picture. London's New Scotland Yard grabbed him. The police of Mexico and Portugal contributed thousands of man-hours to the laborious search which preceded his capture. Investigators of Sirhan Sirhan's crime turned abroad, too—to the Middle East of his drab and frightening boyhood. All, in essence, sought answers to a terrible question. What possessed these two accused men?

Both Sirhan and Ray were products of families which were hard put to cope with the most basic problems of life. Both seemed governed by a curious, even touching unreality. Sirhan believed he could

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In London a police constable stands guard (left) at Cannon Row station where James Earl Ray was taken after his arrest. Above, a police van transports Ray (not visi-

ble), under heavy guard, to his arraignment. At top is the 1956 DeSoto owned by Sirhan Bishara Sirhan. Los Angeles police found the car near the hotel where Robert

Kennedy was assassinated and scoured it for fingerprints and other clues. Like Ray, Sirhan was detained under conditions of extreme security while awaiting his trial.

# The eccentric cop-dodging trail of James Earl Ray

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ride Thoroughbreds. Ray believed he could hold up grocery stores. One was repeatedly thrown. The other was repeatedly arrested. But here their similarities cease. Sirhan seems formed in the classic mold of political assassin—small, proud, polite, repressed and aboil with a secret, almost religious sense of cause: Arab nationalism. But cynical, alley-shrewd, money-hungry James Earl Ray was something else again.

**H**undreds of policemen in both the U.S. and Canada are laboring hard this week to answer the most vital and puzzling question implicit in either investigation: If James Ray held the gun, was he also the tool of a conspiracy which planned and paid for the death of Martin Luther King? The evidence is conflicting, exasperating and maddeningly inconclusive. Ray had money—a great deal more money than he had ever possessed in his life—during all the 13 months between his escape from Missouri's State Prison in April 1967 and his arrest in London June 8th. None who have ever known him believes for a minute that he so-resented King that he would have risked his neck to shoot him out of so unprofitable a motive as spite. "I know," said his brother Jerry, "he wouldn't have put himself in a spot like this unless there was something in it for him." But he may well have gotten a pile of money by other means—as one of two masked bandits who took \$27,000 in cash from his hometown bank of Alton, Ill. on July 13, 1967.

One has only to see photographs of the three Toronto citizens whose names Ray adopted before and after the King assassination to marvel at their resemblance to him. Union Carbide Supervisor Eric St. V. Galt (whose middle name the fugitive mistakenly took to be Starvo) is not only similar in looks, hair color, weight and height but, like Ray, bears scars on his forehead and right hand. Both Constable Ramon George Sneyd and Education Consultant Paul Bridgman also match his general description. It is generally conceded that he did not locate these doubles without the assistance of others. Few believe, however, that such service stemmed from any real conspiracy—it seems, rather, to have been the kind of aid almost any well-heeled ex-con could commission in the stews of a big city.

No real criminal organization

conspired with Ray—the Mafia simply does not use small-time losers as hit men. Neither, by all odds, did any racist group like the Ku Klux Klan—which must now regard outsiders as stool pigeons of the FBI. But the U.S., for all this, is not devoid of an occasional rich nut to whom the new ambitions of the Negro are anathema—and who might find a James Earl Ray a perfectly usable instrument of repressive social expression. This possibility must be weighed against one fascinating fact. The Alton bank robbers carried-off currency in mixed denominations. But Ray, whether or not he shared these spoils, surely tapped some other source of revenue: week by week, ever since last summer, he has made his every real expenditure—including \$1,995 for the white Mustang he bought in Birmingham last summer and abandoned in Atlanta after King's death—solely with \$20 bills.

The day-by-day, week-by-week

record of Ray's 13 months of cop dodging are full of curious inadvertencies, reflections of habit and odd clues to character. He could not resist schools which promised minor skills. He went to Montreal last summer—shortly after the Alton bank robbery—and was moved, during his stay, to mail off \$17.50 for correspondence lessons from a locksmithing institute in New Jersey. He went south to Birmingham the next month—and took dancing lessons every Tuesday night for a month. By January, having driven west, he was a student at a Los Angeles school for bartenders. He patronized obscure bars—and obscure prostitutes. Once he ran an ad in a Los Angeles "underground" publication, *The Free Press*, which read: "Single male, Caucasian, 36, desires discreet meeting with passionate married female."

Sporadic, veiled but persistent suggestions of purpose intruded themselves, nevertheless, in this

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ERIC GALT



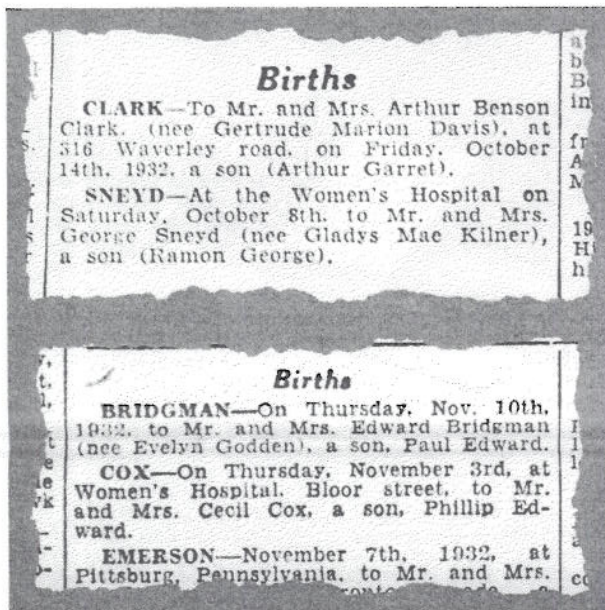
PAUL BRIDGMAN



RAMON SNEYD



JAMES RAY

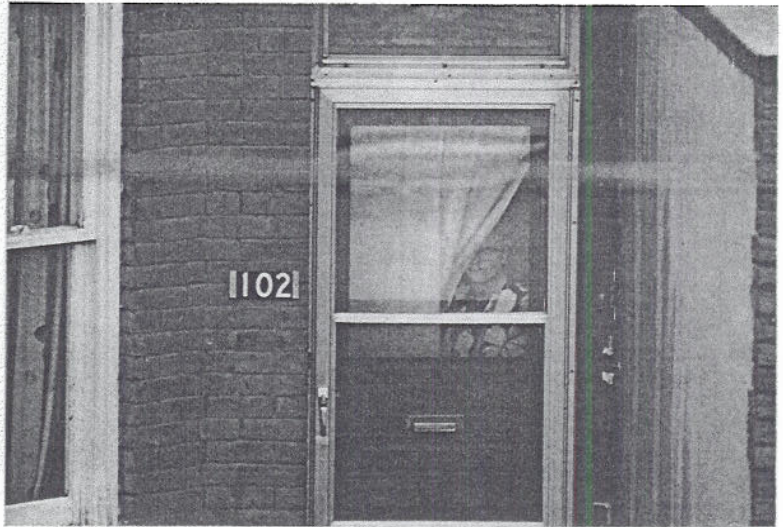


## Three identities in Toronto

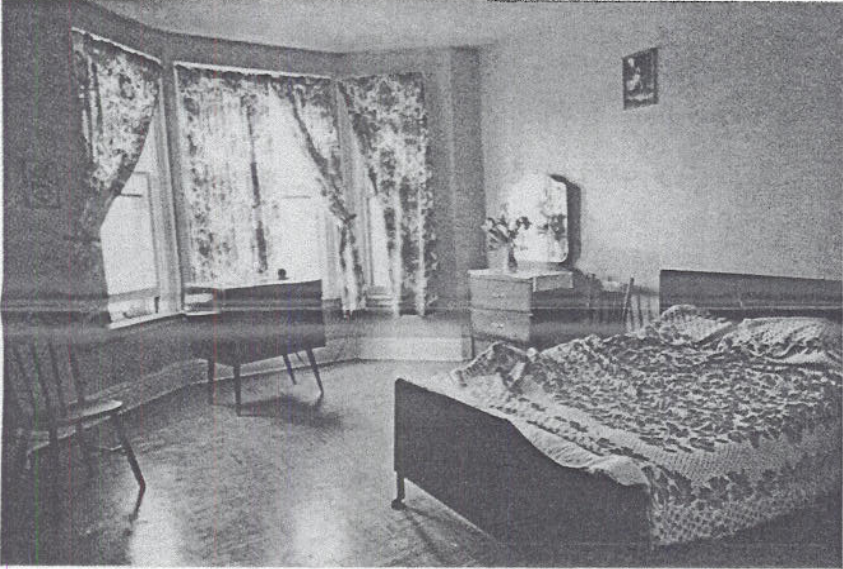
To confound his pursuers, James Earl Ray successively assumed the identities of the three men shown with him above. None of the three is acquainted with Ray or one another, but they all live in the same section of Toronto and all three—Galt, a warehouse foreman, Bridgman, a teaching consultant, and Sneyd, a policeman—have at least a moderate physical resemblance to Ray. Police think Ray visited the Toronto public library and may have picked his alter egos from birth notices (left) in old newspapers on file there. (Sneyd and Bridgman were born a month apart in 1932, Galt 18 years earlier.) Investigators found that someone had left a check mark in pencil over the Bridgman announcement.



Toronto landlady, Mrs. Yee Sun Loo, described a "fat man" who delivered a letter to Ray. Police later cleared a man who said he found the letter in a phone booth.



On April 8, four days after the King assassination, James Earl Ray rented a room in this house in Toronto from Mrs. Adam Szpakowski (in window).



Ray's \$9-a-week room boasted a bay window and a homily on the wall. On April 21 he moved to the middle house below, six blocks away.

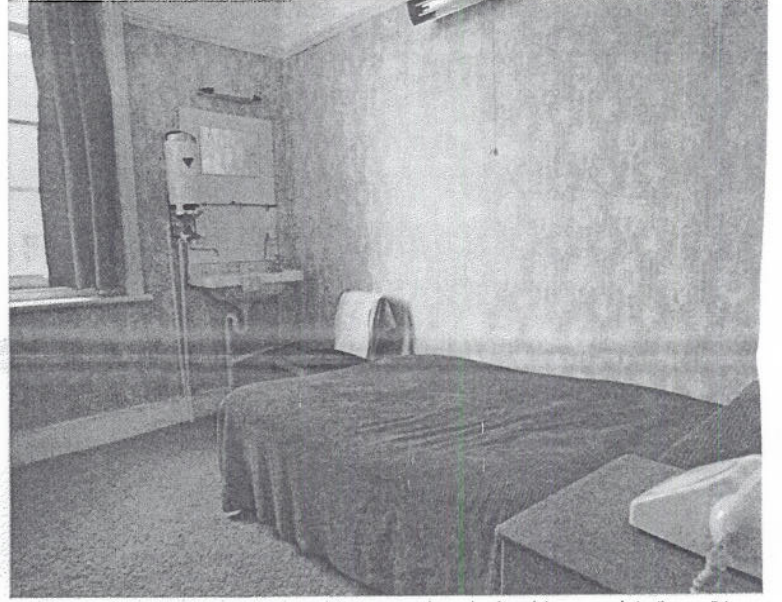


## Hideouts in Lisbon and London

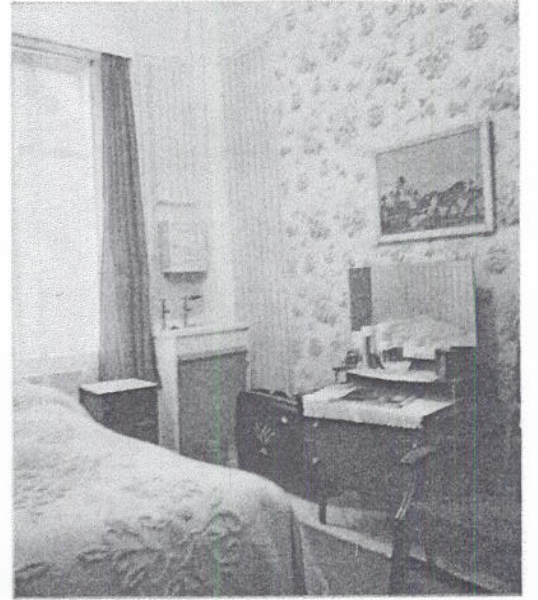
Armed with a Canadian passport made out to "Ramon George Sneyd" and enough cash to live modestly without working, Ray continued his odyssey to England and Portugal. In downtown Lisbon he rented a \$2-a-day room and frequented waterfront bars where he often was taken for a seaman. Returning to London, he chose a neighborhood with a heavy transient population, nicknamed Kangaroo Valley for the many Australians who live there. He changed addresses once more, then tried to leave the country, and was caught.



On May 8 Ray checked into the Hotel Portugal in Lisbon (above) and got a room with French windows.



In London, Ray registered on May 28 at the New Earls Court Hotel (above), a "bed-and-breakfast" establishment where he lived for a week in Room 54.



On June 5 Ray switched London hotels, going to the Pax in Pimlico. He stayed in the above two rooms, left hurriedly on June 8—the day of his arrest.

# 'Would you please step into our office, Mr. Sneyd?'

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aimless and wandering existence. He started 1968, for instance, by writing from California to segregationist Rhodesia—a nation with no U.S. extradition agreement—to ask how a U.S. citizen could enter the country. He drove east in March, moved into a "hippy" boardinghouse in Atlanta and signed himself Eric Starvo Galt. He went to Birmingham six days later, walked into the Aeromarine Supply Company and bought a rifle—a Remington Model 760 Game-master, 30.06 caliber with Redfield telescopic sight. On April 4, Memphis police found it on the sidewalk near where King was murdered. After making this purchase, Ray went back to Atlanta and made an awful mistake: he sent one of his correspondence schools the address of the boardinghouse—an act which eventually led the FBI to the place and to a single thumb print on a discarded road map which proved Galt to be escaped Missouri convict James Earl Ray.

The fugitive vanished completely, nevertheless, the day after Martin Luther King's death. He left his Mustang in the parking lot of Atlanta's Capitol Homes housing project at 8:30 in the morning after the killing and very probably took a plane to Canada. He materialized as Paul Bridgman at Mrs. Adam Szpakowski's \$10-a-week Ossington Avenue rooming house in Toronto—"I'm a salesman for Mann and Martel real estate and I need a place to stay"—four days later. It would be hard to guess whether Ray believed he had obliterated his trail and achieved invisibility in Toronto—although he certainly walked the streets openly, shopped for pornography and drank "Molson's Canadian" night after night at a go-go bar named the Silver Dollar.

For all his apparent confidence he wasted little time in preparing to change identity again and slip away overseas. By April 19—the day the FBI revealed that it knew Galt to be James Earl Ray and the day James Earl Ray knew himself to be a hunted man—he had already booked his round-trip, \$345 BOAC flight to London for May 6. He had also, in obvious awareness of Canada's lax travel regulations, asked a ticket agency to get him a passport as Ramon George Sneyd—a transaction which can be accomplished with no more proof of birth and background

than a simple statement to a notary public. He had even prepared to move, also as Sneyd, to yet another rooming house—this one run by a Mrs. Yee Sun Loo—on yet another nondescript street. But one can only speculate on the havens he sought from then on, and the means—in which he seemed increasingly frustrated—by which he hoped to reach them.

He spent hardly 24 hours in London after arrival; instead he traded the return portion of his overseas excursion ticket for a British European Airways seat to Portugal, pocketed the \$14.60 in change and headed for Lisbon. Nothing yet reconstructed of his 10-day stay there sheds any slightest light on his intentions. He slept in Room 2 of the Hotel Portugal—a severe, clean, third-class haven for the frugal on a street which smells of charcoal and spitted chickens. He went to seamen's bars—the California, the Bolero, the Europa—drank beer and talked to the local prostitutes. He slept with one, gave her 300 escudos (roughly \$11) and seemed on the point of weeping when she showed him pictures of her fatherless children. Then he flew back to England again and vanished for 11 days. He resurfaced again on May 28. But fate was now closing in; only 11 more days—eight of which he spent at the New Earls Court Hotel on seedy Penywern Road and three at the Pax Hotel in similarly seedy Pimlico—remained to him.

FBI men back in the U.S. were working their way through endless cabinets of passport applications in search of a picture of James Earl Ray. Royal Canadian Mounted Policemen were engaged, at the FBI's request, in a similar search in Ottawa. The RCMP found the photo of Ramon George Sneyd—after having gone through 200,000 documents—matched it with an earlier picture of Ray and sent the application off to Washington. The capital "S" and capital "G" with which Ray had signed Ramon George Sneyd exactly matched the capital "S" and capital "G" with which he had signed Eric Starvo Galt. Ottawa placed a "stop order" on the Sneyd passport.

In London, as if in response to some extrasensory perception, fugitive Ray began to show signs of acute nervousness. He renewed his quest for information about



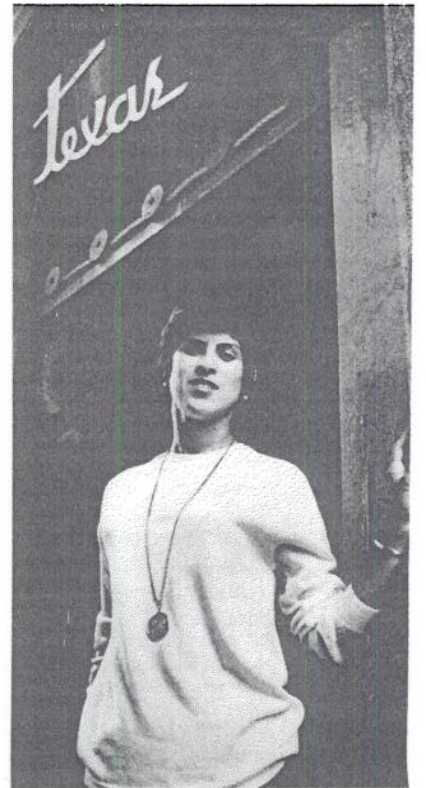
A chambermaid, Maria Celeste (above), cared for Ray's Lisbon room: "He left every day at the same time. He was meticulously neat but he never took a bath."



Earls Court receptionist Jane Nassau helped Ray learn Britain's decimal currency: "I recognized his Southern drawl and wondered why he had a Canadian passport."



Mrs. Anna Thomas, proprietress of the Pax Hotel, brought breakfast to Ray's door: "He was always fully dressed. I had the idea that he never got undressed for bed."

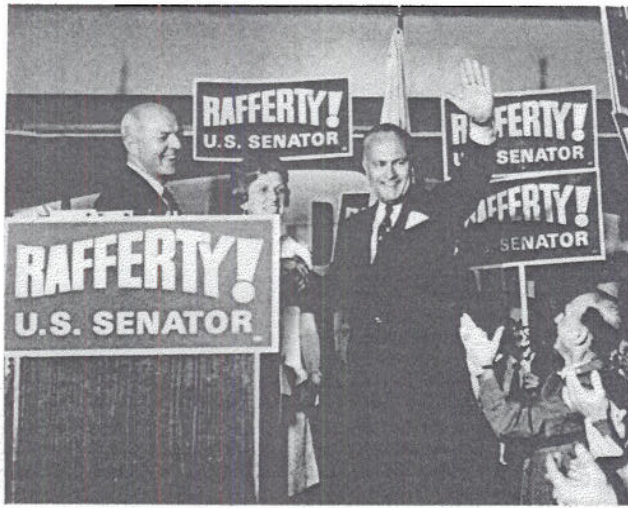


Maria Irene Dos Santos, a prostitute, met Ray at the Texas Bar in Lisbon. He gave her 300 escudos (about \$11). She says, "I hope he's not in any big trouble."

Rhodesia. He went to a street call box, and out of the blue telephoned Ian Colvin, an editorial writer and African expert on the *Daily Telegraph*, and questioned him about mercenaries in Portuguese Africa. His agitation increased when he read the news of Robert Kennedy's assassination. He moved instantly from Earls Court to Pimlico and renewed his telephonic interrogation of Writer Colvin who finally—on being pressed—mentioned a resident of Brussels as one who could conceivably help him. Colvin promised to mail the man's address to the Pax Hotel. He did not.

Ray booked a flight to Brussels anyhow, appeared at London Airport at 11 o'clock in the morning on Saturday, June 8 and was placed gently in custody by minions of the queen. "Would you please," a smiling immigration officer asked him, "step into our office, Mr. Sneyd?" He did, although he was carrying a loaded snub-nosed .38 caliber revolver. Detective Superintendent Thomas Butler—famed nemesis

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On Friday, June 8, two scared men, one a Mexican, the other Puerto Rican, came forward with an account of an unusual meeting in the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles on the night Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated. They had nothing to report of conspiracy. But their story cast a fascinating light on the movements and emotional state of the accused killer just before the shooting.

Enrique Rabago, 35, a hairy-chested, unemployed mechanic, and a friend—not named—said they first encountered Sirhan Sirhan in the lobby outside the Vene-

*After Sirhan was thrown out, Max Rafferty waves to supporters at his Ambassador Hotel victory party.*

## The other party he went to before the shooting

tian Room. It was about 9:15 p.m. the night Kennedy was shot. Sirhan had just been thrown out of a party being held by the backers of conservative Max Rafferty, who was to win the G.O.P. senatorial nomination.

Dressed in white pants and a white, tieless shirt which made his dark skin look even darker, Sirhan had stuck out among those affluent, happily celebrating Anglos. A waitress refused to serve

# The Subtle Twisting

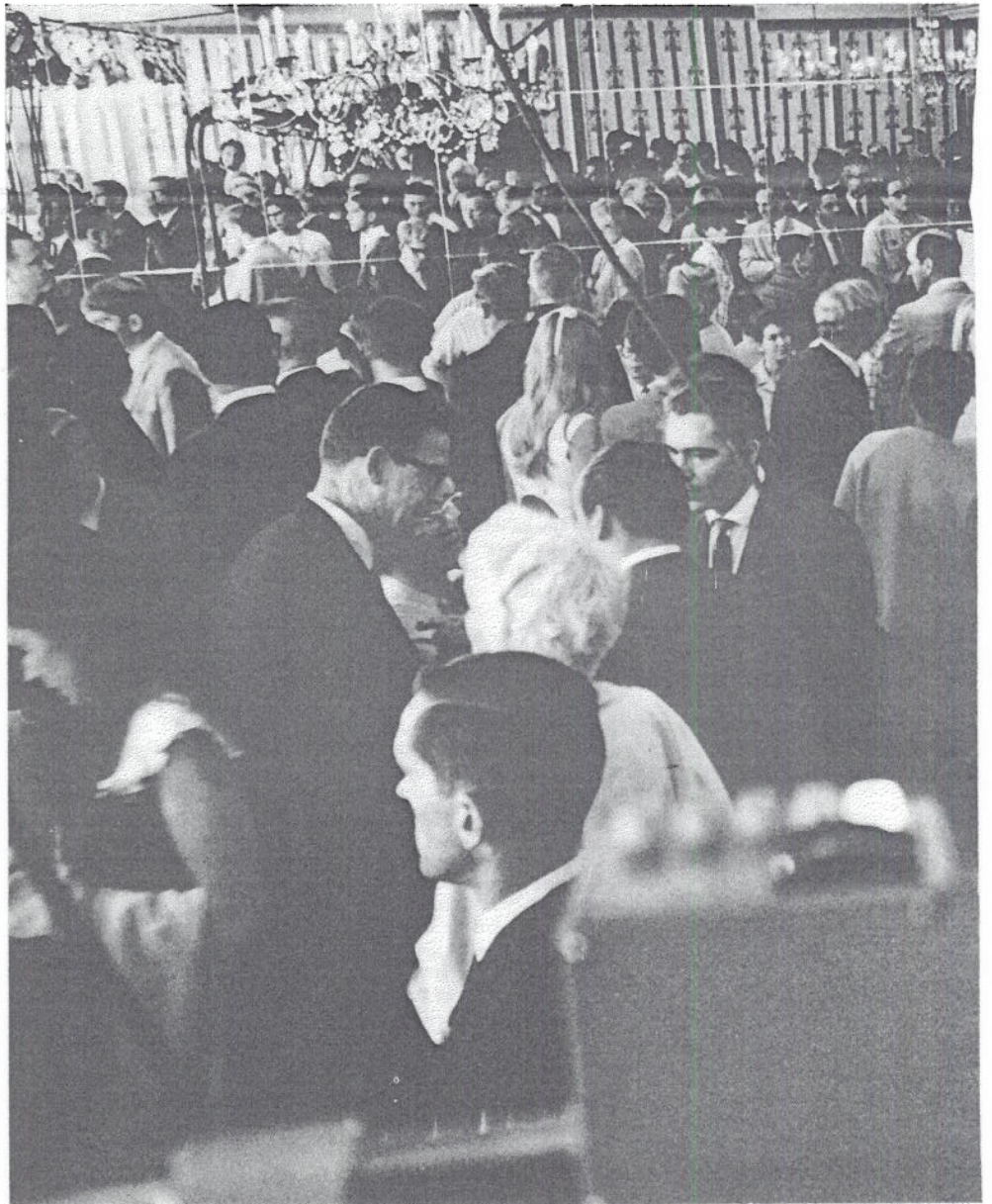
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of the Great Train Robbers—drove out in person to make the collar. So ended the history of Galt-Bridgman-Sneyd—though there still remain questions about James Earl Ray. Will he stand trial alone if and when he is extradited to the U.S.? What defense will he present—and how will a Memphis jury react to it?

Few such imponderables profane the case against Sirhan Bishara Sirhan. Dozens of people saw him at Los Angeles' Ambassador Hotel on election night this month. He was at a Republican senatorial victory celebration, and later, he sprayed bullets about the pantry corridor where Robert Kennedy received his fatal wound. Olympic Decathlon Champion Rafer Johnson not only helped wrestle away his cheap, eight-shot Iver Johnson automatic but gave it immediately to the police. The weapon's history led directly to the scene of the crime—from its original purchaser to his married daughter to a neighbor youth to Sirhan's brother Munir and, thence, to Sirhan himself. Los Angeles bluecoats were immediately outside the hotel—to check an improperly parked car—and not only had the good luck to seize Sirhan red-handed but to protect him from those who would have beaten him bloody, and to stow him away, unharmed, for justice by courts as free as any of regional and political influences.

But the tale of Sirhan Sirhan is not concerned with legalities—except in its doleful epilogue. It is only concerned, in essence, with the slow, subtle and inexorable

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him a drink; he put up a fuss and contemptuously tipped her \$20 "for nothing." A security guard eased him out.

Rabago and his friend asked Sirhan what had happened. He told them and suggested that all three go back in. They hesitated, then said no. Whereupon Sirhan, the sounds of the Republican party echoing in the background, spilled forth his eloquent rage at "the rich Rafferty people who step all over the poor."

Meanwhile, on the other side of the lobby, Democrats crowded through the doors leading into the Embassy Room. There Kennedy would soon deliver his victory speech. Rabago had an idea. To mollify Sirhan, he nodded toward the Embassy Room and said, "Rob-

ert Kennedy might help the poor."

"Kennedy! Kennedy!" shouted Sirhan. "He should never be President. You think he really wants to help the poor?" His voice quavered. At the time, Rabago recalls, he thought Sirhan might have had too much to drink. Now he thinks it may have been pure rage. "Kennedy helps himself. He's just using the poor. Can't you see that?"

Rabago and his friend say they shook their heads and tried—without luck—to reason with Sirhan. Then they watched him wander off, slightly dazed, toward the Embassy Room and the Kennedy party.

*Enrique Rabago, an unemployed mechanic, met Sirhan just before the Kennedy assassination.*



## of Sirhan Sirhan



At Los Angeles police headquarters immediately after his arrest, a disheveled Sirhan posed for the mug shot above. The photograph at left, taken as 300 Rafferty backers partied at the Ambassador expecting victory, may include the accused killer—but he cannot be identified with any certainty.



In 1947, one year before the Palestine war began, the Sirhans appeared to be a happy united family (above). The father worked for the Jerusalem city water depart-

ment. Sirhan, seated next to his father, was three. He had four brothers, one sister. Top row, left to right: Saad Allah, Ida, Sharif. Next to Sirhan is Adel, and Mrs.

Sirhan holds the baby, Munir. The war changed their lives. Broke and unemployed, the father moved from Jerusalem to Amman to find work, leaving his family behind.

Finally, in January 1957, the Sirhans emigrated to the U.S. Applying for passports, Sirhan, then 12, and his mother were given a joint security clearance by Jordan (right).

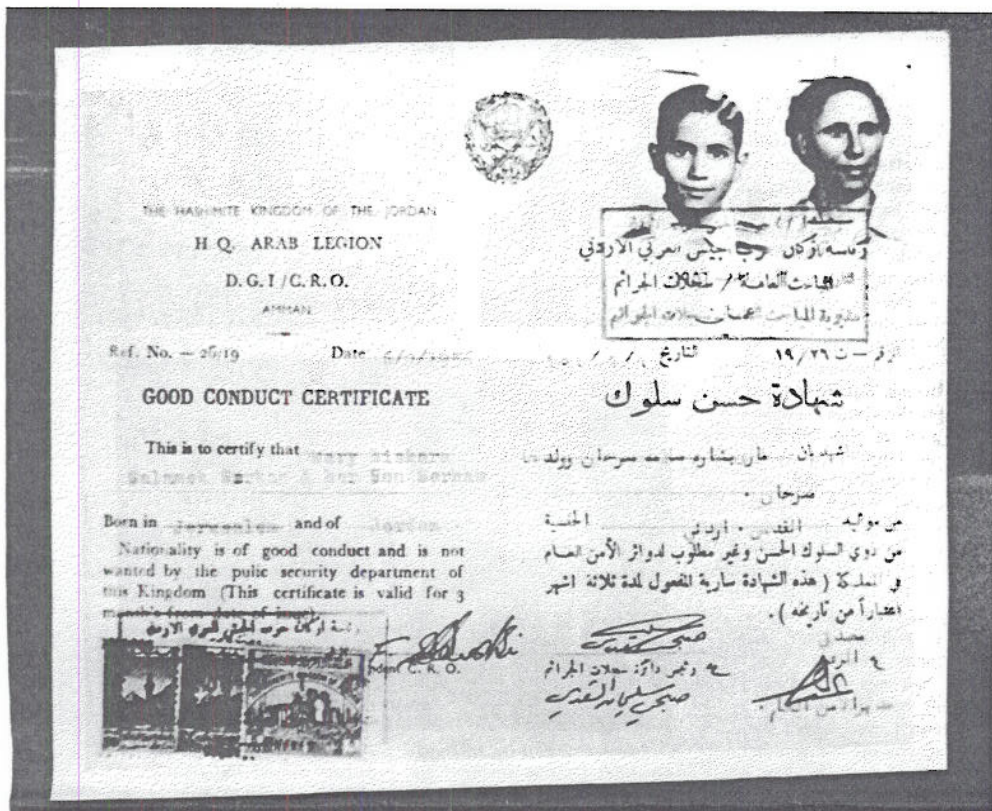


The war-damaged street (far left) where the Sirhans lived after the 1948 fighting until they left for California exists, largely unchanged, in the Jewish quarter of the old



# Fourth son in a family beaten with sticks

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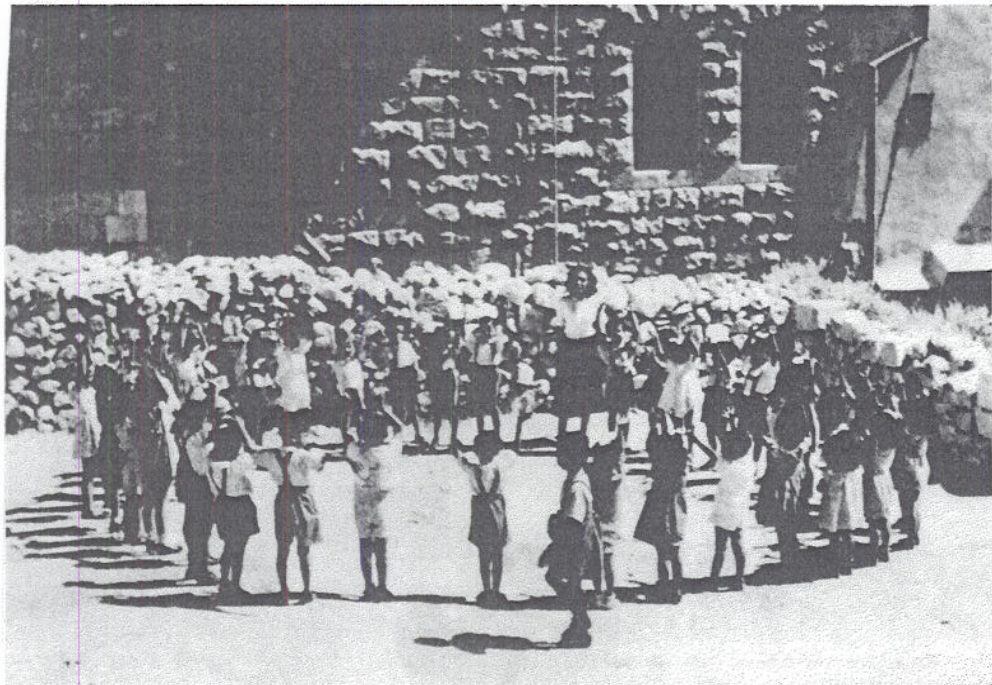


twisting of one human being and the awful death of another. One cannot really understand it but only look into it as into a distorted mirror. Sirhan Sirhan did not drink. He did not smoke. His brothers, Saad Allah and Sharif, had "trouble"—and brushes with the law. Not Sirhan. He was polite. He was quiet. He concentrated hard on his studies as a schoolboy and on obscure religious philosophy as an adult. He shunned girls throughout—and remonstrated with married men who did not. He kept a notebook, and on one page—part of which was made public after he was jailed—he had written: "Robert Kennedy must die by June 5. . . ."

Sirhan Sirhan grew into boyhood as a Christian Arab in Jordan's Old City of Jerusalem. He was the fourth of five Sirhan sons—there was also one daughter—and was apparently the most diligent, attentive and polite. He was also unstable and unhappy; neighbors remember that Sirhan's father, Bishara, beat his children with sticks and fists when they disobeyed him and once held a hot iron to one of Sirhan's heels. The boy was subject to other horror—he was only four when the 1948-49 Israeli-Arab war swept over Jerusalem, but his impressions of fear and sound lingered in his mind. It was his mother who dominated the family in times of trouble, who led them to the U.S. when Sirhan was 13 and kept them together in California when father Bishara abandoned them and went back to Palestine. It was the mother to whom Sirhan clung. "She loved her children," says an old acquaintance in the Middle East, "but she was a terribly harsh, narrow-minded and rigid woman."

Sirhan, for all this, overcame enormous handicaps—an awareness of his own strangeness in the eyes of his schoolmates, shyness, a mingled envy and repudiation of the people and the attitudes of garish Southern California. He kept out of trouble, blended, almost as if he were transparent, into the student body of Pasadena's John Muir High School. He was graduated and went on to two years at Pasadena City College. But his ambition of ambitions seemed odd, indeed, in one of his intelligence and education: he burned to be a jockey. He failed.

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part of Jerusalem. The Sirhans occupied one room plus a small kitchen (center left). Sirhan went to classes at the Martin Luther School and attended Sunday

school at the Lutheran Church. One of his classmates, Lili Ramien (left, standing in front of the school and church), remembers he "had no really close friends"

and "was very happy about going to America." Above, Sirhan's class plays in the schoolyard in an old picture. He is third from left of the boy walking in foreground.

# A 'hot-walker' obsessed by his homeland's fate

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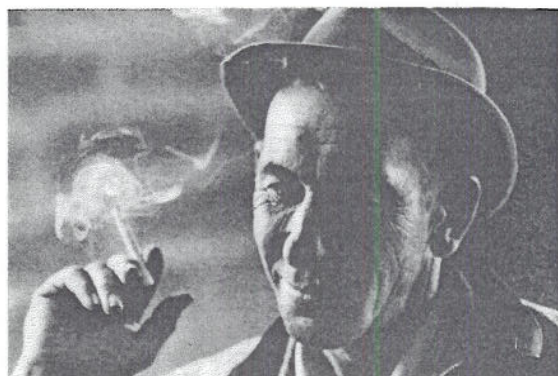
When he first approached the stewards at Santa Anita, they soon demonstrated that he lacked the experience or the reflexes to be part and parcel of a flying Thoroughbred. He persisted at the track, as a lowly "hot-walker" and exercise boy, though he was often, in the racing jargon for falls, "buying real estate."

He spent the summer of 1966 exercising mounts at Granja Vista Del Rio Horse Ranch in Corona, Calif. He was quiet, as always. He worked hard. He saved his money. But in the end he abandoned his curious dream for good. He was thrown, badly, from a galloping filly early one morning in September and taken to the hospital with cuts and bruises. Perhaps from injured pride, perhaps from disillusionment, he grew disenchanted with horses and, after a few more scattered days of work on the track, gave them up for good. He also came to believe that his injuries were far worse than they were judged to be by the physicians who attended him, and applied for damages under California's workmen's compensation law.

**H**e was suspicious of everything I was doing," recalls Dr. Richard Nelson, who was on emergency duty when Sirhan was brought to the hospital. "He didn't want any shots. He said that in the old country people told him not to have shots. We finally gave him one for tetanus. But he was in the hospital mostly for observation of possible internal injuries. There were none." A month later Sirhan complained of pain, blurring and "extreme motion" in his eyes. An eye specialist failed to find evidence of such a condition and told him he "seemed to be exaggerating." He demanded a letter verifying his injuries as a basis for a disability claim. The eye man, Dr. Milton Miller, refused. "He told me he was going to 'get me' and that I'd be sorry." Last summer Sirhan filed a disability claim for workmen's compensation and began a series of arguments with new doctors. He also found em-

ployment as a driver and stock boy for a health food store entitled Organic-Pasadena. He refused to demean himself by wearing an apron, worked hard—and quit after six months when the Holland-born owner, John Henry Weidner, questioned the order in which he was doing a series of chores. "So I'm a liar," he yelled. "I never lie."

He enjoyed one triumph: he won a \$2,000 settlement for his spill on the track. But he writhed, inwardly, at the awful setbacks Arabs endured at the hands of the Jewish blitzkrieg in the six-day desert war last summer, and gradually envisioned Robert Kennedy as the archenemy of Arabic hopes and dreams. "We argued a lot about the Jews," says Market Owner Weidner. "He hates them. He claims they are responsible for the fact that his people do not have jobs and money. I told him that I had many bad experiences with the Gestapo but that I do not hate Germans. I tried to tell him that hate eats you up. He wouldn't listen. He would just say, 'I'm a Jordanian Arab.' He was consumed with himself. If he should die for what he has done, he will go to his death believing that he, Sirhan Sirhan, was the one in the right."



Sirhan wanted to be a jockey. In 1966 he was licensed by California (top left) to be a "hot-walker"—one who walks horses after workouts. Later, as an exercise boy at a ranch in Corona, Calif. owned by Bert Altfillisch (top right), Sirhan earned the reputation of a "real-estate buyer"; he fell off horses. Further, Trainer Larry Heinemann (above) says, "He never should have been a jockey. He was too smart."



The Sirhan bungalow (above) in Pasadena is guarded by police while —hali a world away—in Jerusalem the building (right) where Sirhan Sirhan was born in 1944 is now occupied by Israeli families. The fam-

ily had fled it three days after the 1948 war began. "It was a terrible thing," Sirhan's father recalls. "Sirhan used to ask me, 'Father, why did they do this? I had to leave my toys because of the Jew. The Jew

took everything. Why?' Today an Israeli boy plays in the yard near the bricked-up windows of the basement-level apartment where the Sirhans once lived. A blind Israeli veteran now lives there.